Invitation to Collaboration

Nicole Humphrey & Amanda M. Shenk

[nehumphrey@liberty.edu](mailto:nehumphrey@liberty.edu) & [ashenk2@liberty.edu](mailto:ashenk2@liberty.edu)

M. Ed. Candidates

Liberty University

Abstract

Professional school counselors have experienced role transformation especially with regards to collaboration. Collaboration is often an underused element in the world of academia and student success. These authors invite school counselors to focus on who, what, where, when, how and why to utilize a holistic approach to collaboration.



**What:**  Collaboration! Professional school counselors (PSC) have the delightful privilege to act as change agents in their schools through collaboration.  Collaboration involves all participating parties maintaining a level of responsibility for the outcome by working together for a common goal. The PSC may invite themselves into opportunities for collaboration and may extend invitations to necessary parties to collaborate.  A PSC will specifically ensure the school's mission is incorporated into collaboration.

**Who:** With respect for confidentiality and human rights PSC may consider collaborating with: students, parents, teachers, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, school administration, social workers, community resources (i.e. behavioral health), interns, judicial systems, therapeutic day treatment counselors, school staff (i.e. lunch attendants, bus drivers) and any other individuals directly involved in the care of the student who may contribute to student success. Based on necessity and student impact each of the collaboration endeavors may be short or long-term, large or small tasks, single incident or recurring problems, and one-on-one or group efforts.  PSC collaborate with anyone who can enhance the students' life or success in the academic, personal/social, and career areas.

**Where:** PSC may collaborate in school classrooms, staff meetings, IEP meetings, school board meetings, homes, the community and wherever else necessary and appropriate. Confidentiality and ethics codes must remain foremost wherever collaboration occurs.

**When:** Collaboration should occur as often as possible. PSC must schedule time for collaboration. PSC are encouraged to follow the ASCA National Model of approximately 25-40% of time of one's day spent in collaboration (Bowers & Hatch, 2005). Collaborative meetings may need rescheduled when crises occur; however, without intentionally allotting time for collaboration, no collaboration will occur.  PSC may want to set a precedent of regularly scheduled meetings to prepare for IEPs and assess previous IEP meetings, as well as setting a time to meet with teams about student concerns, upcoming trainings and workshops.

**Why:** PSC should collaborate to ensure student success. PSC through collaboration can encourage professional development.  Collaboration in conjunction with school psychologists could prove beneficial especially when an Axis I diagnosis exists or to seek recommendation for outside counseling sources.  Collaboration may be a beneficial alternative or even a first step in determining if an outside referral is necessary. Even the speech and language pathologists (SLP) are a source of collaboration for the PSC. SLP along with PSC can offer enrichment on specific communication disorders in a classroom guidance lesson, parent workshop or professional development which may increase awareness of these specific disorders (Barnes, Friehe, &  Radd, 2003).  Although little information has been published about the subject, the authors believe the PSC could partner with the therapeutic day treatment counselors through in-class lessons and faculty education to build cohesion throughout the school.  PSC might also gain insight from non-instructional school staff (i.e. lunch attendants, bus drivers) and identify problems students’ may be exhibiting in other areas of school.

**How**:  Collaboration will manifest differently for each situation and child, however, it is the recommendation of these authors that as often as possible the PSC initiate the collaboration.  Often there is resistance from other parties toward collaboration; this resistance could be associated with a difference of definition. Handling these differences with respect and diplomacy may lead back to more effective collaboration.  Often times not only do the student benefit from collaboration but the parties involved in the process grow and learn as well.  Care must be taken so that collaboration stays within the mission of the school or it could lead to personal agendas rather than student success. A new direction within the realm of collaboration includes elements of inclusion students may benefit from having direct intervention by the PSC in their native environment for behaviors (Sink, 2008). However, this may not lead to the most appropriate academic environment as there is a risk of the counselor becoming a teacher's aide rather than maintaining the role of school counselor.

**R.S.V.P:** With how collaboration has positively impacted students, parents, staff, etc. in your districts.

**References**

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